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ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether a course in pedagogical content in English would have an impact on the lesson plans of 11 student teachers. Students were directed to write lesson plans for the short story "To Build a Fire" by Jack London, both at the beginning of the course and at the conclusion. Student teachers' perceptions of their lesson plan differences were compared to those of the investigators. Two students, Helen and Marv, were selected for closer study. Helen's lesson plans evidenced the greatest amount of change. Marv's lesson plans evidenced the least amount of change. Although Helen's and Marv's academic backgrounds and levels of achievement were similar, Marv's expressed reasons for wanting to teach were more detailed. On the other hand, Helen's class standing in the pedagogical content course was significantly higher than Marv's. Helen's lesson plans evidenced more sensitivity to the objectives of the pedagogical content course than did Marv's. She gave significant attention to preparing the students for reading the text, guiding them through the text, and then providing them with opportunities to respond to the text in sequenced speaking and writing activities. Findings suggest that the pedagogical content course can have a differential effect on changing the lesson planning strategies of student teachers. (Two tables of data are included.) (RS)

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THE PEDAGOGICAL CONTENT COURSE'S EFFECT ON THE LESSON PLANS OF TWO STUDENT TEACHERS

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Background for the Study

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The course in English pedagogical content was developed as part of an innovative fifth-year preservice program, modeled on the concept of a professional development school, in this case a program employing the collaborative efforts of faculty and staff from a local high school site and faculty and staff from the university training site. The course was predicated on the belief that beginning teachers have difficulty getting executive control over the subject matter they teach. The course, planned

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collaboratively by school and university English faculty, focused primarily on curriculum theory and how it intersected with subject matter. More specifically, the course studied how critical theory could be applied to lesson planning for secondary school students. In addition, the course stressed pedagogical strategies as they related to beginning teachers' major problems--discipline and management. The course was offered during the second of three quarters of a fifth professional year. Student teaching activities during the first quarter were limited to two hours per day, mainly observation and limited small group and whole class instruction. It was midway through the second quarter that student teachers would make a transition from limited to full-time student teaching. The pedagogical content course, then, came at a critical period in the student teachers' professional development.

Course Objectives

Pedagogical content represents the intersection of subject matter and theory in curriculum and instruction. Basically, the course attempted to show students how literary critical theory could guide teachers in teaching secondary school students to understand and appreciate literary text. The collaborative committee developing the course chose Scholes' Textual Power as the focus critical work. Of particular interest to the committee was Scholes' concept of three levels of processing text: reading, interpreting, and criticizing. Next, the committee agreed on four core literary texts for the student teachers to study in common: Rudolfo Anaya's Bless Me, Ultima, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club, and William Shakespeare's Macbeth. The texts were chosen because of their classic status as defined by

a state-level framework and because of inherent difficulties in teachability resulting either from language or context. As for curriculum and pedagogical theory, the students studied Kathleen Dudden Andrasack's Opening Texts. The committee believed this text showed teachers how to develop instructional strategies that guided students into the text, through the text, and beyond the text. As one committee member noted, the approach was consistent with effective reading pedagogy, for instance, the directed reading activity and SQ3R. Each of the four literary texts was presented in the form of a demonstration lesson by faculty members who had served on the committee. Two demonstration lessons were done by university faculty and two by faculty from the local participating high school. After each demonstration, the students debriefed the demonstration and discussed the lesson's probable applicability to students of varying needs, including students with learning problems, unmotivated students, and disruptive students. By design, the students were to emerge from the course with an understanding of teaching literature with a theoretical as well as a pedagogical orientation. The investigators believed not only that this orientation might be captured in a lesson plan but also that a shift in orientation might be shown in the comparison of lesson plans prepared immediately before the course and immediately after the course.

Though relatively little investigative research on teacher lesson planning exists, professional literature does support the importance of lesson planning. Arnold (1988) maintains that the planning aspect is so important that it alone can determine the failure or success of a teacher. Clark and Yinger (1980) report that little has been done to clarity the roel of lesson planning and deliberation, processes central to teaching as a profession. Miller (1991), after observing a number of teachers, found that planning for

spontaneity of interaction between teacher and student in daily lesson plans led to success in teaching. Research on teachers' lesson planning has been predominantly concerned with the instruction which teachers receive for the specific task of planning lessons. The Virginia State Department of Education (1981) developed the Management for Effective Teaching Long Range Planning Model to provide practical assistance in planning for classroom management and teaching. Pennella (1985) researched the functions teachers attribute to their lesson plans, reporting that an understanding of these functions may increase the value and efficacy of written lesson plans. Osburn (1983) advocates instructing teachers how to prepare lesson plans that provide for teaching skills using whole language activities, while assessing the child's growth with specific objectives. Regarding specific format of lesson plans, contrary to what is taught to preservice teachers Clark & Yinger (1979) assert that there is no single most appropriate format, and Kagan & Tippins (1992) suggest that the traditional lesson plan format is counterproductive.

One study does, however, investigate the influence of professional coursework on the content selection and organization of prospective English teachers. Grossman (1991), contrasting the focus and planning of teachers with and without teacher preparation, reports that without formal pedagogical preparation, teachers rely on their disciplinary knowledge and personal experiences in selecting curricular materials, and they organize courses according to the disciplinary constructs of genre or chronology. Teachers with and without formal preparation also differed in the relative emphasis they placed on writing and literature. Donlan and Black (in press) contrasted two sets of lesson plans written by students at the beginning and at the conclusion of an English pedagogical content course to determine the effect the

course had on changing the lesson plans of eleven students enrolled in that course. The present study expands this investigation by focusing attention on two students, the one experiencing the most post-course change in lesson plans and the one experiencing the least post-course change.

Procedure

Prior to the first meeting of the class, the investigators had given student teachers copies of Jack London's "To Build a Fire" with these instructions: "Have this story read before the first class meeting." On the first day of class, prior to passing out the syllabus, the investigators gave the student teachers the following writing task to complete, without further instructions, within a thirty-minute period:

> Given what you perceive to be an average tenth-grade English class, describe how you would go about teaching Jack London's short story "To Build a Fire."

The investigators collected the papers and saved them.

On the final day of class, ten weeks later, investigators distributed another copy of the Jack London story and presented the student teachers with the identical writing task within the identical time frame. When they completed the task, investigators returned to them their earlier lesson plans. Then investigators asked them to compare their later draft with their earlier draft and describe what they perceived to be basic differences between the two

lesson plans.

For each of the eleven student teachers in the class, investigators had collected three documents: (1) the initial lesson plan, (2) the later lesson plan, and (3) the self-assessment of differences.

Data Analysis

Analyzing Differences Between the 11 Pairs of Lesson Plans

To insure objectivity, the investigators examined the eleven pairs of lesson plans without reference to the student teachers' self-assessment of differences. Working together, the two investigators studied each pair of lesson plans and compiled for each pair of plans a list of differences.

Qualitative Differences Between Pairs of Lesson Plans. Before looking at the lesson plans, the two investigators established for the purpose of the study that a difference could be determined in one of three possible situations. First, a given variable could be present in the one plan but absent in another. For example, in one plan a student teacher directs the students to look up in the dictionary difficult words from the story and copy the meanings. In the other plan, vocabulary is not dealt with. Second, a given variable could be substituted for another variable. In one plan the student teacher has the students look up in the dictionary difficult words from the story and copy the meanings, but in the second plan the teacher explains the

difficult words and has the students write sentences with context clues. In other words, vocabulary is treated in both lessons, but one method is substituted for another. In the third circumstance, a variable could appear in both plans but to a greater or lesser degree. For example, in the first plan a student teacher could prepose five questions to guide students in their reading but use only one question in the second plan.

The two investigators emerged from the analysis of eleven pairs of lesson plans with 28 qualitative differences. Table 1 contains a list of these qualitative differences, organized by the three difference conditions.

Table 1. 28 qualitative differences occurring between 11 pairs of lesson plans, organized according to condition of difference

Present/Absent Variables

1. Specific directions on how to read the story (Plan 2)
2. Highlighting concepts students are to look for in reading (Plan 2)
3. Shows students summarization strategy that will help them check for their understanding of the story (Plan 2)
4. Students write on man's relationship with the dog (Plan 2)
5. Use of concrete objects to clarify abstract concepts (Plan 2)
6. Use of video to establish mood (Plan 2)
7. Use of film to help students write comparison/ contrast paper (Plan 2)
8. Use of multiple film clips (Plan 2)
9. Use of overhead projector to formulate spreadsheet (Plan 2)

10. Pre-reading hands-on sensory experiences (Plan 2)

11. Students share story-related personal experiences (Plan 2)

12. Dramatics focused on moral decision-making and discussion of personal values (Plan 2)

Substituted Variables

1. Introducing the text by personally involving the student in the topic (Plan 2) rather than providing direct information about author setting, and background (Plan 1)

2. Having students writing in response to the literature (Plan 2) rather than using discussion (Plan 1)

3. Using role-playing (Plan 2) instead of lecture (Plan 1)

4. Having students dramatize the plot-line (Plan 2) rather than discussing plot directly (Plan 1)

5. Group thinking/writing activity (Plan 2) instead of whole class discussion or individual writing assignments (Plan 1)

6. Small group improvisations (Plan 2) instead of whole class discussion and writing (Plan 1)

7. Students discuss their written impressions (Plan 2) rather than the general topic (Plan 1)

8. Focusing on helping students comprehend the story (Plan 2) rather than predetermined questions serving as comprehension checks (Plan 1)

9. Discussing general themes, e.g., the individual vs. nature (Plan 2) rather than author's purpose (Plan 1)

10. Story's theme is stressed (Plan 2) rather than the story's events (Plan 1)

11. Story presented to students on tape (Plan 2) rather than round-robin student reading (Plan 1)

12. Students rewrite parts of story from dog's perspective (Plan 2) rather than comparison essay or discussion of theme (Plan 1)

Variables Varying in Intensity

1. Greater variety of activities (Plan 2)
2. Greater detail in describing student activities (Plan 2)
3. Pre-posed questions narrower and more focused (Plan 2)
4. Topic for journal entry more focused (Plan 2)

As Table 1 indicates, differences between the first and second set of lesson plans tended to be the result of new variables or substituted variables rather than the continued use of a variable but at a different intensity. These data suggest that the student teachers demonstrated a willingness to use new methods or approaches. However, not all students reflected the same degree of change.

Although the time allocated for the planning of both he first and second lesson was controlled for, there was a range of differences with respect to the plan's length and detail. For example, one pair of lesson plans had 7 qualitative differences (Helen's); whereas another pair of plans yielded 1 qualitative difference (Marv's). See Table 2 for the qualitative differences in pairs of lesson plans written by Helen and Marv.

Table 2. Investigators' perceived differences between the first and second lesson plans of Helen and Marv.

Helen

1. Attuned physical sense by manipulation of the environment. Element ignored in first lesson plan.

2. Use of concrete objects. Element ignored in first lesson plan.

3. Use of one specific focusing question, rather than several less focused questions used in first lesson plan.

4. Asking the student to internalize the character's situation rather than asking the student to evaluate the situation as an on-looker, as was done in the first lesson plan.

5. More direction on how to read "To Build a Fire" in the second plan.

6. Inclusion of group work. This element was omitted in the first lesson plan.

7. Involving the students in hands-on activity which would lead into the story as opposed to merely introducing the story as was done in the first lesson plan.

Marv

1. Application of story vocabulary, rather than mere memory retrieval as was done in the first lesson plan.

Because the range of change was so marked, the investigators decided to select Helen and Marv for more in-depth study.

Profiles

Because the lesson plans represented a range in differences, the investigators developed profiles on two student teachers who had participated in the study, one whose plans exhibited the greatest number of differences and one whose plans exhibited the least number of changes.

Helen

Background. Investigators noted that Helen's pair of lesson plans contained the most differences. Helen, like the other students in the class, was in her second quarter of student teaching. At the time she was taking the pedagogical content course, Helen, an Anglo, was 23. She had completed a B.A. in

English at this University with an overall 2.9 GPA with a 3.1 in her major. According to her application to the program, Helen's earlier work as a Sunday School teacher motivated her to Education as a career. She perceived teaching as a career full of challenges, rewards, and continual change. Also, she expressed a preference for teaching older children. Once admitted to the fifth-year credential program, she maintained a GPA of 3.6. Of the eleven students enrolled in the pedagogical content course, she had the highest class standing, receiving the maximum credit for each of the thirteen assignments.

Helen's First Lesson Plan. What follows is the verbatim text of Helen's first lesson plan.

To Build a Fire

Jack London

To begin a lesson on this story, if time permitted, students would read the story aloud in class. At times, fifteen year olds do not make reading a priority in their spare time. By reading in class, I would be assured that at least most of the students had an understanding of the story.

Once the story had been read, the class would have a discussion. I would ask for first impressions on the character of the man in the

story. I would encourage specific references to the story. The gory details would undoubtedly be their main focus, but I would encourage them to concentrate on the man specifically. Why would the man go against the advice of the old-timer? What did the man's choices say about him?

Once characters had been established, I would discuss the problems the man encountered. What made his problems increase? Have the students ever encountered a similar situation?

Investigators' Interpretation of Helen's First Lesson Plan. Helen's plan called for no student preparation. The initial activity involved students reading the text aloud, and the rationale was based on her assumption that students would not read independently. She planned to follow the reading by having the students first discuss some of the more sensationalistic aspects of the story and then focus in on the man's actions and motivations. The last discussion question was intended to involve the students by having them recall possibly related personal experiences. The lesson contained, basically, two activities: reading aloud and discussion. The lesson showed concern for managing the behavior of unmotivated students.

Helen's second Lesson Plan. The verbatim text of Helen's second lesson plan follows.

Into

1. Students enter a very cold classroom. As they complain, I will ignore their pleas.

2. Journal Topic. Have they ever experienced a near-death situation or witnessed a death?

3. Discussion. Discuss journal topic.

Through

1. Read text in class to insure that everyone is familiar with it. Students will alternate every paragraph as they read out loud.

2. Check for understanding.

Beyond

1. Draw the scene.

2. Ask for a volunteer to come to the front of the room and place his/her hand in a bowl of ice water. Student will describe for the class what feelings they are experiencing.

3. Open mind exercise - Students will work in groups putting the thoughts of both the man and the

dog on paper.

4. Discuss foreshadowing with the students. Assign a two page paper requiring students to discuss what led to the outcome as well as what foreshadowing they read.

Investigators' Interpretation of Helen's Second Lesson. Helen's lesson contained three distinct phases: preparation for reading, guidance while reading, and follow-up activities. The lesson contained nine student activities. Preparation for reading consisted of three linked activities: controlled experience, writing, and discussion. Guidance while reading contained two linked activities--reading aloud and checking for understanding. (Although this element was not described, the investigators inferred that Helen planned to intersperse spontaneous questions about the text while students were reading aloud. The four activities that constituted the follow-up were not as closely linked. For example, having the students "draw the scene" had no connection to the "bowl of water" activity. Likewise, the "open mind exercise" and the discussion on foreshadowing leading to the -assigned paper"seemed similarly unconnected.

Helen's Self Analysis of Differences. In contrasting her first lesson plan with her second, Helen made the following observations:

Like the first (lesson), I still have my students read in class. I have always felt that reading together makes the class lesson more successful.

> Aside from that, there are differences. My new ideas a more detailed, and a great deal more creative. Rather than simply asking for feedback, I involved the students more. I make them experience the cold, and get into the thoughts of the characters. I have learned how to create activities quickly.

Investigators' Analysis of Helen's Awareness of the Differences. As the data in Table 2 indicate, Helen's second lesson exhibited 7 differences from the first lesson. Helen's self analysis indicates that she was aware of five of the seven differences: (1) more detailed nature of the plan, (Plan 1) more creative and quickly generated ideas, (3) involvement of students in experiencing the cold, (4) attempting to get students to get inside the character, and (5) continuous involvement of the students in reading and responding to the text. Helen was unaware of two aspects of the lesson. First was the use of concrete objects. Perhaps what made student involvement in the lesson such a significant aspect was the use of concrete objects, specifically the bowl of cold water, and, perhaps to a lesser degree, the manipulation of the room's thermostat. Also Helen seemed unaware that her questions were more focused and clustered around a central issue, that is, death, which linked the initial journal exercise to the later discussion of foreshadowing. In the investigators' opinion, Helen was able in general terms to indicate general differences, but in doing so she overlooked two important mechanisms she had used to make the overall lesson cohesive.

Marv

Background. Investigators noted that Marv's pair of lesson plans contained the least number of differences of the eleven pairs examined. His mentor teacher was one of the two high school English teachers who had helped plan the pedagogical content course. At the time he was taking the pedagogical content course, Marv, an Anglo, was 26. He had completed a B.A. in English at this University with an overall 2.8 GPA with a 3.4 in his major. According to his application to the program, Marv's desire to teach high school English came late in his academic career. During his sophomore year, he had a strong desire to teach English at the college level. However, during his senior year, his off-campus job required that he supervise high school students, all of whom, he discovered, found English an uninteresting subject. After graduation, Marv worked as a counselor. These work experienced changed his career goals from higher education to secondary education. He wanted to instill the excitement of literary study in his students. Once admitted to the fifth-year credential program, Marv maintained a GPA of 3.5. Of the eleven students enrolled in the pedagogical content course, his class standing was ninth. Marv elected not to turn in one of the thirteen assignments.

Marv's First Lesson Plan. What follows is the verbatim text of Marv's first lesson:

> To Build a Fire J. London
>
> The lesson would begin with vocabulary from the chapter that might be unfamiliar to the student so

as to aid in reading the story. Next, I would probably try to get the students into the proper mind-set for the story by asking them to write a reflective journal entry on some subject related to the cold an being alone, etc.

I would then give some background on the author and the story before having the students read the story.

Activities to aid understanding would include a personal sketch of the narrator, (what kind of person he was, by your observation, his possible motivations for traveling alone, etc...).

I might also give the students a writing assignment to write how they would have behaved in the same situation as the character in the story.

Finally, a discussion on London's point (the theme) would be in order to see what class comprehension was

P.S. Sorry but this was written under an extreme time deadline...

Investigators' Interpretation of Mary's First Lesson Plan. This lesson was

constructed of seven activities somewhat loosely connected. The first activity deals with undesignated vocabulary followed by an unrelated activity in journal writing to establish "a mind-set." The background on the author to precede the reading is unrelated to either of the earlier activities. In effect, three activities prepare students for reading the story, but the activities themselves do not seem to build one on another. The follow-up activities are similarly disjointed. Three writing activities and one discussion activity seem to have no sequence. Basically, the seven activities are text-based but they are not related to one another. For example, students are never directed to use the vocabulary that was introduced at the beginning of the lesson. Likewise, the writing activities never seem to be part of the discussion.

Marv's Second Lesson Plan. What follows is the verbatim text of Marv's second lesson plan:

> To Build a Fire Introduction
>
> * Ideas for Teaching in No Particular Order
>
> 1. Prewriting Activity: Tell me about the coldest experience you have ever had --where were you and how did you feel?
>
> 2. Have the students brainstorm adjectives for cold weather situations and write up a weather forecast for the Yukon.

3. Write/draw a "missing/wanted" poster for the man and his dog using a picture and a description of the two. (Reward sum is optional.) (Picture can be drawn or out of a magazine.)

4. Using vocabulary words from the story, have students write a letter (assuming the persona of one of the friends of the missing man) to his parents to tell them that he is missing.

5. Create a travel brochure for the Yukon using information the story concerning scenery, food, people you meet, etc...

6. Rewrite the story from the dog's point of view.

7. Essay topic: Why did the man die and the dog live? Would the story have ended differently if the man had been able to kill the dog?

Investigators' Interpretation of Marv's Second Lesson Plan. This lesson plan contains six writing activities and one activity loosely designated as "prewriting" which could be either a discussion or a writing activity. By Marv's own admission, the activities are to be taught in no particular order. As a result, the activities are not related to one another. Except for the prewriting activity, the activities seem to require that the students have

read the story, although no activity directs the students to actually read the text.

Marv's Self Analysis of Differences. In contrasting his first and second lessons, Marv made the following observations:

> As I expected, there was a great difference between the two lessons. As this class has progressed, I have managed to form some new ideas about the presentation of material and the converting of text into activities.
>
> My initial lesson was very pedantic and academic in nature - two things guaranteed to turn off students. The prewriting journals were okay, but there was far too much emphasis on straight "lecture/discussion type teaching. This manner of presentation keeps the students on the "outside" of the text.
>
> My second plan emphasized activities geared more towards bringing the student self into the story -making them a part of it by drawing from their impressions, their imaginations, and their individual interpretations. I am a changed man!

Investigators' Analysis of Marv's Awareness of the Differences. As the data in Table indicate, investigators noted one difference between Marv's two les-

son plans--students were required to use vocabulary when they produced a given written text. Marv did not note this difference specifically, but did indicate that these activities did draw the students into the tex.. Presumably, apply vocabulary to original writing could be considered a way of drawing the students into the text. Marv, on the other hand, does not seem to be aware of the fact that there seemed to be little structural difference between his first lesson and his second; rather he characterizes the differences as "great." Investigators noted that both lessons involved seven unrelated activities dominated by a cluster of isolated writing assignments. Although the activities were cosmetically enriched -- polished -- both lessons seemed to lack a notion of sequence, that is, how to prepare the student to read the text and how to get the student to respond systematically to the text.

Conclusion

In conducting this study, investigators wanted to see whether a course in pedagogical content in English would have an impact on the lesson plans of the eleven student teachers enrolled in the course. Students were directed to write lesson plans for the short story "To Build a Fire" by Jack London, both at the beginning of the course and at the conclusion. Students perceptions of lesson plan differences were compared to those of the investigators. Two students were selected for closer study, Helen and Marv. Helen's lesson plans evidenced the greatest amount of change. Marv's lesson plans evidenced the least amount of change. Although Helen' and Marv's academic backgrounds and levels of achievement were similar, Marv's expressed reasons for wanting to teach were more detailed. On the other hand, Helen's class standing in the pedagogical content course was significantly higher than Marv's. It was the

investigators' opinion that Helen's lesson plans evidenced more sensitivity to the objectives of the pedagogical content course than did Marv's.
She gave significant attention to preparing the students for reading the text, guiding them through the text, and then providing them with opportunities to respond to the text in by sequenced speaking and writing activities. It appears, then that Helen met the course objectives at a higher level of performance than did Marv. One could conclude, then, that the pedeagogical content course can have a differential effect on changing the lesson planning strategies of student teachers.

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